

A PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS OF
CLAUDE DEBUSSY'S *ESTAMPES*

A CREATIVE PROJECT
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BY
YUYANG CHEN
DR. LORI RHODEN – ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA

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Achille-Claude Debussy (August 22, 1862, Saint-Germain-en Laye, France—March 25, 1918, Paris) was a French Impressionist composer and music critic whose works greatly influenced music in the twentieth century. He developed a highly original system of harmony and musical structure that in many ways expressed the ideals to which the Impressionist and Symbolist painters and writers of his time aspired. Debussy showed talent as a pianist by the age of nine and was encouraged by Madame Mauté de Fleurville, a pianist associated with Chopin. Debussy entered the Paris Conservatory in 1872, where he studied piano performance and composition.¹ He was a good sight-reader and a virtuoso pianist. After he graduated from the Paris Conservatory, he traveled to Russia. In the summer of 1880, he was hired by Tchaikovsky's patron, Nadezhda von Meck, to teach her children and to play duets with her. During this time, he was exposed to many Russian composers, including Alexander Borodin and Modest Mussorgsky. The novel harmonies employed by these Russian composers deeply influenced Debussy's own compositional language.²

In 1889, Debussy attended the International Exposition and visited the many cultural exhibits from all over the world. Among these was a Javanese pavilion where he became exposed to *gamelan* music and the dancing that accompanied it.³ He became fascinated by the Javanese *gamelan* along with the Annamite theater, particularly the pentatonic harmonies and the unique tone color of the *gamelan*.⁴ Debussy's experience with the Javanese *gamelan* at the Paris International Exposition continued to have a great influence on his musical style throughout his lifetime. The exposure to these different styles of music completed the formation of his aesthetic beliefs.

While staying in northern Burgundy in the summer of 1903, Debussy composed *Estampes*, which became one of his most famous piano works. *Estampes* consists of three

¹ François Lesure, "Debussy, Claude," *GroveMusicOnline*, accessed May 20, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.

² Ibid.

³ James R. Briscoe, *Claude Debussy: A Guide to Research* (New York: Garland, 1990), 10.

⁴ Lesure, "Debussy, Claude."

individual pieces: “Pagodes” (Pagodas), “La soirée dans Grenade” (An Evening in Granada), and “Jardins sous la plouie” (Gardens in the Rain). This collection includes many of the signature traits of his compositional style and is considered by many to be the point of departure for Debussy’s exploration of new sounds for the piano. After 1903, Debussy developed a completely new approach to the piano, which became evident in his later piano compositions *Images* and *Preludes*.⁵

Pagodes

“Pagodes” begins Debussy’s exploration of new sounds through the use of musical idioms from Oriental music, particularly the Javanese *gamelan*. “Pagodes” is clearly written in imitation of *gamelan* music, though it is composed solidly in a western form both structurally and harmonically. The piece is percussive and resonant, like the *gamelan*, and contains several pentatonic scale structures to emphasize the “Oriental flavor.”⁶

The term “pagoda” is used to describe Asian tiered towers with multiple overhanging eaves. These structures are typically recognized as being representative of China, Japan, Korea, or Vietnam. The sloped rooflines are a prominent feature of this structure, and are the motivation for the shape of Debussy’s melodic material.

Form

Debussy does not totally break from traditional rules of form within “Pagodes,” but he is innovative in his use of harmony. Instead of using the traditional approach to harmony, where cadences assist in dividing sections, Debussy defines sections by the various motives used throughout the piece.

⁵ J. G. Prod'homme and Marguerite Barton, “Claude Achille-Debussy,” *The Musical Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (October 1918): 561.

⁶ Paul Roberts, *Claude Debussy* (London; New York, NY: Phaidon Press, 2008), 62.

Debussy uses many motives and melodic ideas throughout this piece, and sometimes uses the same motives in different sections. He also tends to favor the same tonal centers in each of his larger sections, making it difficult to break the form up based on key center. Therefore, the best way to discuss the form is by looking at which motives are being used. Using this approach, this movement could be analyzed as an ABA' form with a coda. The A section covers mm. 1-31; the B section covers mm. 31-52; and the A' section covers mm. 53-77. A lengthy coda brings the piece to a close in mm. 78-98.

The A section begins with a B-major tonality, mostly centered around the B pentatonic scale. Motive A enters at m. 3 in the right hand, and consists of a short repeating upward shape, whose rhythm is often varied. Motive B, which functions as a countermelody to the first motive, appears at m. 7 in the left-hand tenor line. This motive, also in B major, uses the leading tone A#, which is not found in the B pentatonic scale. Debussy briefly implies the key of G# at m. 11, where motive C enters in octaves in the left hand.

After presenting these three motives, Debussy provides a brief interruption section at mm. 15-18. This leads to m. 19, where motive C appears again in octaves passed between the hands in G# minor. Motive B appears again in mm. 19-23. The music finally returns to B major at m. 23 where Debussy presents a variation on motive A played polyphonically between the two hands. Measures 27-30 begin a transition to section B, which begins at m. 31.

Section B contains not only the motives employed in the A section, but also new material. A new motive D appears in mm. 33-36 in the right hand in B Lydian mode. Measures 37-44 contain variations of both motive A and motive B.⁷ Motive D returns at mm. 46-53, making two statements. The first statement contains pedal points in the right hand on F# and G#. The second statement adds trilled pedal points on G#-A# and C#-D#, and leads to the return of the A section.

⁷ E. Robert Schmitz, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1950), 84.

Measures 52-77 mark the A' section. The piece ends with a coda that begins at m. 78.⁸ The coda develops all of the motives in section A: motive A appears at mm. 80-83, motive B appears at mm. 85-87, and a variation of motive C appears at m. 88 to the end of the piece.

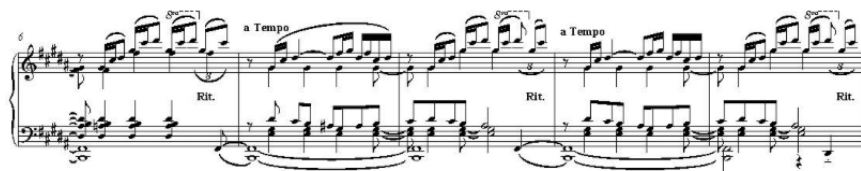
Texture

Debussy creates orchestral sonorities with this composition. The writing is primarily homophonic (see figure 1) and polyphonic (see figures 2 and 3), and varies from thick sound collages to thin, light sections. Many of the homophonic sections are accompanied by ostinato patterns, often presented in syncopation. The polyphonic sections represent multiple layers of bells of various sizes. In the coda, Debussy extends the range both higher and lower, with three layers: long bass notes functioning as pedal points, the main melody in the middle voice, and brilliant passagework on the top.

Figure 1. Debussy, *Estampes*, “Pagodes,” mm. 1-5.

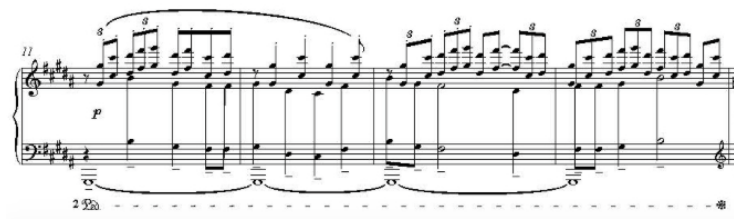


Figure 2. Debussy, *Estampes*, “Pagodes,” mm. 6-10.



⁸ Ibid.

Figure 3. Debussy, *Estampes*, “Pagodes,” mm. 11-14.



Rhythm

Debussy uses great variety in his rhythmic patterns. In polyphonic sections, he provides different rhythmic patterns simultaneously in different voices. For example, mm. 7-10 contains three different rhythmic patterns in the upper four voices (see figure 2). He also uses many two-against-three rhythms as well, especially notable in mm. 23-26 (see figure 4).

Figure 4. Debussy, *Estampes*, “Pagodes,” mm. 23-26.



Debussy also uses a variety of different rhythmic patterns to accompany his melodies. He incorporates syncopated quarter-note chords, triplets, and the pattern of two sixteenth notes followed by an eighth note. In addition, the running pentatonic passagework is often presented with differing note values, including thirty-second notes, sixteenth notes, quintuplets, and triplets.

Melody

Debussy uses two different pentatonic scales in this piece, including different rotations. For example, motive A is built on the B major pentatonic scale and enters at m. 3 in the right hand (see figure 5). Although the note B never actually appears in the right hand, the left hand provides the B in the bass and tenor line. Motive B enters at m. 11, and is comprised of the relative minor rotation of the same pentatonic scale in the middle voice: G#-B-C#-D#-F# (see figure 5).⁹ The other pentatonic scale used within the piece can be found at m. 15 within the interruption. It is played in the upper voice of the right hand and is based on the D# minor rotation of the F# major pentatonic scale: D#-F#-G#-A#-C# (see figure 5).

Figure 5. Instances of pentatonic scales in Debussy's *Estampes*, "Pagodes."



Debussy often varies the main motives. For example, motive A, first heard at m. 5, is varied at mm. 11-14, mm. 27-30, and again at m. 37-44 (see figure 6). There are also several

⁹ Anatone, discussion on Debussy's *Estampes* by Yuyang Chen, June 21, 2016.

variations of motive B. The original motive is stated in m. 11, followed by the variations at m. 37, m. 41, and m. 88 (see figure 7).

Figure 6. Debussy, *Estampes*, “Pagodes,” mm. 5-6, mm. 11-14, mm. 27-30, mm. 37-38.



Figure 7. Debussy, *Estampes*, “Pagodes,” mm. 37-38, mm. 41-43, mm. 88-89.



Figure 7 (continued).



Aside from pentatonicism, Debussy also employs modes in this piece. For instance, motive D is in B Lydian, played on top of the dominant F# (see figure 8). The same melody repeats again in mm. 46-49 and mm. 51-53 in the left hand.

Figure 8. Debussy, *Estampes*, “Pagodes,” mm. 33-36.



Tempo and expression marks

The piece is marked “Modérément animé” (fairly lively). This tempo should be maintained throughout with the exception of the occasional *ritard*. While there are some tempo changes indicated in the score, these changes should be minor fluctuations in the tempo rather than the use of significant *rubato*. For example, m. 4, m. 6, and m. 8 all contain *rit.* marks on the fourth beat of each measure followed by *a tempo*. In m. 10, there is no *rit.* at the end of the similar passage (see figure 9). At m. 19 and m. 23, there are tempo markings “*Animez un peu*” (a little more lively) and “*Toujours animé*” (still busy), both of which require the performer to play a little faster, but still within the main tempo marking of “*Modérément animé*.”

Figure 9. Debussy, *Estampes*, “Pagodes,” mm. 7-12.



There are also expression marks that indicate the mood and character of different sections. For example, m. 3 is marked “*délicatement et presque sans nuances*” (delicately with hardly any nuance), which means it should be played very evenly and transparently, with the melody not rising much above the chords. Measure 37 is marked “*dans une sonorité plus claire*” (in a lighter tone), which suggests that the running middle voice in the right hand should be played evenly and softly with a clear bell-like tone on the top Ab; the melody in the left hand should be played peacefully and lightly.

Dynamics and tone colors

Debussy uses mainly *pianissimo* and *piano* dynamics in this piece; he rarely uses *forte*. There are many places where he indicates “2 ped”, which means to hold both the sustain pedal and the *una corda* pedal down together. Although he requires a lot of softer playing, there are many subtle dynamic and color changes in this piece. For example, in mm. 11-14, the dynamic level increases from *pianissimo* to *piano*. From mm. 15-22, although there is no *una corda* pedal marking, the dynamic level remains *piano* and the melody contains hairpin

dynamics. This requires the tone color to be a little brighter than the preceding measures.

There is a small *crescendo* in m. 18, but the following measure returns to *piano*.

Another example of subtle changes of *piano* can be seen from m. 80 to the end of the piece. While the whole section is marked *pianissimo*, there should be different gradations of this dynamic level. Although this section begins *pianissimo*, this is the first time that motive A is heard in this section, which should be played softly but still lively and bright. At m. 84, the left hand presents motive B in octaves, which should be played a little bit thicker than the preceding four measures. At m. 86, motive B is presented again with a different bass note, and this time it can be played a little darker, as the bass note descends by a minor second. Measure 88 presents motive C in the left hand, marked “*più pp*,” which requires the performer to play a little softer than before. Measure 91 is marked “*encore plus pp*,” which means *more and more pianissimo*. Measure 97 is marked “*aussi pp que possible*” (as *pp* as possible), and in the end Debussy indicates “*laissez vibrer*” (remain vibrating), which requires the performer to execute the most extreme level of *piano*.

There are only two instances where Debussy writes *fortissimo*: mm. 41-43 and mm. 73-78. He begins to build to a climax in m. 31-41 by gradually increasing the texture from two-note harmonic seconds to thicker chords. Measure 41 provides the full climax, marked *fortissimo*, with full chords in both hands. The tone color should also be more resonant, which should sound like lots of big bells ringing.

Pedaling

Even though the pedal is used consistently throughout, a careful technique must be used to maintain transparency and clarity. The percussive nature of the *gamelan* instruments inspires us to use a light, percussive staccato touch even when the pedal is held down. As Roberts says, we need “a refined touch for creating a variety of simultaneous dynamic levels,

and, in conjunction with the sustaining pedal, a rapid release of the key – in the manner of gong-playing – the moment the sound is created.”¹⁰ Roberts says this gong-playing technique is “in reality a private illusion” because the piano action releases the note as soon as the string is struck no matter how the key is released.¹¹

The opening section is marked “2 ped,” indicating that both the *una corda* and sustain pedals should be held down. Clearly the sustain pedal is to be used throughout the opening; the question is how to maintain clarity. According to Elder, Gieseking, who was considered a master performer of Debussy’s music, taught his pupils that the sustain pedal should be held without change for mm. 1-6, changed right after the down beat of m. 7, held without change for mm. 7-10, changed right after the down beat again at m. 11, then held again for mm. 11-14. The score indicates that the two pedals should be held without change for mm. 11-14.¹² This suggests that pianists have a little more freedom to change the pedal before m. 11, but not for mm. 11-14, and that the *una corda* pedal should be held all the way to m. 16. If one wants to change the sustain pedal at the beginning of m. 5, one should make sure to hold the low F# from the previous measure during the change, and similarly for later measures (see figure 10).

Figure 10. Debussy, *Estampes*, “Pagodes,” mm. 1-6.



¹⁰ Schmitz, “The Piano Works,” 82.

¹¹ Ibid., 87.

¹² Dean Elder, “Gieseking's Pedaling in Debussy and Ravel” in *The Pianist's Guide To Pedaling*, ed. Joseph Banowetz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 315.

There are other places that require different pedaling techniques, such as flutter pedaling. At the end of m. 44, during the three F# octaves, the volume should be reduced rapidly to *pianissimo* by use of flutter pedaling. Measures 78-79 begin *fortissimo* and diminish all the way to *pianissimo*. In order to maintain the clarity of every note and take the dynamic level down rapidly, flutter pedaling should be used again through mm. 78-79 (see figure 11).

Figure 11. Debussy, *Estampes*, “Pagodes,” mm. 77-80.



Practice and Performance Suggestions

In order to create a soft and light sound with a warm tone color, as is needed at the beginning of this piece, a careful touch is required. When playing the first three chords, one should take a breath, and then use the arm's weight to bring each hand down with a slow descent to the keyboard so that each chord blends together to create a multi-layered sound.

This piece also requires the pianist to use different touches in both hands simultaneously. For example, in mm. 11-14, the right hand plays octaves marked staccato, but the staccatos are also under long slurs; at the same time, the left hand plays octaves with tenuto signs. Both hands need to move horizontally, which can be best executed by leading

the passage with the arms. The right hand requires a light and soft non-legato touch to the key to produce bell tones, while the left hand needs a deeper touch to the key while playing legato.

There are other technical challenges as well. For example, in mm. 78-98, there is a continuous, rhythmically-complex passagework section based on a pentatonic scale. These measures are marked entirely *pianissimo*, which is very difficult to perform at the indicated tempo. Also, the passagework is presented in varied rhythms: quintuplets, thirty-second notes, and thirty-seconds and triplets. It is important to play these rhythms fluidly, with no accents when the rhythmic patterns change. Shifts in the range also require attention, so one should practice playing every note with consistent tone. Since the right hand in this section should be played very fast, the pianist should practice the right hand individually by using different groupings and accents; this will help the pianist play all of this passagework in time and evenly. Finally, the right hand should not be played as a finger exercise, with a focus on individual notes. Instead, the right hand should create an atmospheric background, accompanying the melodic lines in the left hand. While playing the right hand in this section, the fingers need to follow the movements of wrist and arm, instead of mostly using only the fingers.

La Soirée dans Grenade

The second piece, “La Soirée dans Grenade,” evokes a Spanish dance through a distinctive dotted-eighth and sixteenth-note *habañera* rhythm, written predominantly in 2/4 meter. The *habañera* is the Spanish version of the *contradanse*, which was an internationally popular style of music and dance in the eighteenth century.

Form

Structurally, the piece consists of three main sections in arch form (ABCB'A') with a coda.¹³ These larger sections can be broken up into smaller subsections, based upon which motivic material is being used and what key the composer implies. Another way in which Debussy breaks tradition is by inserting a coda after the B' section, only to be interrupted by the A' section. Rather than functioning as a definitive closing section, the coda functions as an interruption of the arch form. Table 1 presents an analysis of the overall large form and the various subsections, as well as the various themes and motives used.

Table 1. Formal analysis of "La Soirée dans Grenade."¹⁴

Measure	Section	Key	Themes/Motives used
1-6	Intro	F#m with Pedal on V (C#)	Dotted rhythm
7-16	A	F#m with Pedal on V (C#)	Theme A
17-22		C#m	Motive X
23-28		C#m	Motive Y and dotted rhythm
29-37		F#m and F#M	Motives X and Z, and dotted rhythm
38-60	B	AM	Dotted rhythm, Theme B (upbeat to m. 42)
61-66	(repeat of mm. 23-28)	C#m	Motive Y and dotted rhythm
67-77	C	F#m	Dotted rhythm, Theme C
78-81		C#m	Dotted rhythm, motive Y
82-91		C#m	Dotted rhythm, motive Z varied
92-97		C#m	Dotted rhythm, motive X
98-108	B'	AM	Theme B
109-121	Coda	CM and F#m	New Coda material, Theme C and dotted rhythm
122-129	A'	F#m with pedal on V (C#)	Theme A with dotted rhythm
130-end		F#m	Dotted rhythm

¹³ Robert E. Morgan, *Anthology of Twentieth-Century Music* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1992), 361.

¹⁴ Anatone, "discussion on Debussy's *Estampes*."

Thematic material

There are seven musical ideas utilized throughout this piece. The most important is the dotted rhythm, which is used within each section. There are also three large-scale melodic units, which tend to become shorter over time: theme A (mm. 7-16, mm 122-127), theme B (mm. 38-60, mm. 98-106), and theme C (mm. 67-77). There are also three smaller-scale motivic units used throughout the piece: motive X (mm. 17-20, 29-32, 92-97), motive Y (mm. 23-28, 61-66, 78-81), and motive Z (mm. 33-36, 82-90).

Theme A (mm. 7-16) is built on a C# Arabic scale: C#-D-E#-F#-G#-A-B#-C#. ¹⁵ In this section, the top voice repeats a continuous C#; the middle voice presents the repeated *habañera* rhythmic pattern on C# as well; and the main melody is presented in the lowest voice (see figure 12).

Figure 12. Debussy, *Estampes*, “La Soirée dans Grenade,” mm. 7-13.



Section B occurs at m. 38, with theme B entering at m. 41 in A major. This theme shares similarities with theme A: the descending notes D-C# found at the upbeat to m. 42 is taken from m. 7, and the rhythmic pattern of a tied note followed by three sixteenth notes can be found in both of these themes. The melody is presented in the uppermost register this time.

¹⁵ Schmitz, “The Piano Works,” 87.

Figure 13. Debussy, *Estampes*, “La Soirée dans Grenade,” mm. 41-46.



Section C begins with a new theme C at m. 67 in the key of F# minor. The left-hand accompaniment presents the *habañera* rhythm against the right-hand melody, which mainly consists of syncopations and triplets (see figure 14).

Figure 14. Debussy, *Estampes*, “La Soirée dans Grenade,” mm. 67-76.



In addition to theme A, the A section introduces three motives that Debussy exploits. Motive X first appears at m. 17 in the key of C# minor. It contains planed ascending dominant-seventh chords, accompanied by the dotted rhythm (see figure 15-A). Motive Y first appears at m. 23 and consists of a rising triplet figure in octaves, harmonized with repeated notes in the inner voices. Both the melody and the inner voices are comprised of the

whole-tone scale. This motive is accompanied by the steady dotted *habañera* rhythmic pattern on the pedal point C# in the left hand, which is also part of the whole-tone scale used in the right hand (see figure 15-B). Motive Z appears first at m. 33 in the key of F-sharp minor, which alternates between different major and minor chords in the right hand and is accompanied by the dotted *habañera* rhythm on F# and C# (see figure 15-C).

Figure 15. Debussy, *Estampes*, “La Soirée dans Grenade,” A-mm. 17-18; B-mm. 23-28; C-mm. 33-36.

A



B



C



Texture

The texture of this piece is not very complicated. There are three types of textures within the piece, all of which are homophonic. Type one contains three layers, and can be seen in mm. 7-16, with a single melodic line with the accompanying *habañera* rhythm. In type two, which can be seen in mm. 17-20, the texture consists of thick chords played in both hands, with the melodic line doubled in the outer voices of the chords. Type three consists of

Figure 18. Debussy *Estampes* “La Soirée dans Grenade,” mm. 71-75.



Regarding tempo, the beginning of this piece is marked “Mouvement de *Habañera*,” which does not give clear tempo guidance. However, this type of dance is typically in a slow tempo. Under the tempo marking, the score has an explanation that says “*Commencer lentement dans rythme nonchalamment gracieux*” (start slowly in a casually graceful rhythm).

This piece contains various tempo changes. For example, at mm. 15-17, there is a “*Retenu*” followed by a “*tempo giusto*,” which occurs again at mm. 27-29. In addition to the subtle *ritards* followed by a return of the original tempo, Debussy also inserts new melodic material as an interruption with new tempos. One example of this is seen at mm. 109-112 and again at mm. 115-118. Here, the new melodic materials enter with a new tempo, which is twice as fast as that which preceded it. Although there are many changes in tempo, the whole piece is still based on the rhythmic *habañera* dance.

Melody

Debussy employs various scales and modes in “La Soirée dans Grenade.” As mentioned before, at the beginning of this piece, theme A appears in a C# Arabic scale. The use of the raised fourth scale degree and the augmented second interval between scale degrees three and four as well as between scale degrees six and seven creates its distinctive, non-Western sound (see figure 19). Debussy also uses whole-tone scales in this piece; motive y (mm.23-28) uses the whole-tone scale in all six measures (see figure 20).

Figure 19. Debussy, *Estampes*, “La Soirée dans Grenade,” mm. 7-16



Figure 20. Debussy, *Estampes*, “La Soirée dans Grenade,” mm. 23-28.

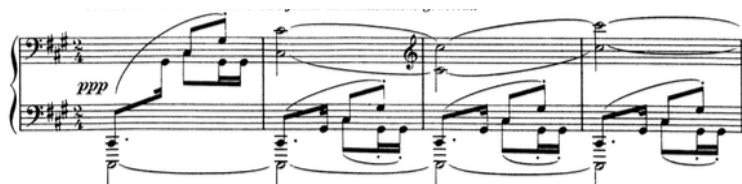


Practice and Performance Suggestions

Similar to “Pagodes,” Debussy wrote a significant portion of this piece at different levels of *piano*. Because all voices should be played softly during the *piano* sections, the voices should contain their own identity through the use of different tonal colors. The lowest voice, which is only played once during the first four measures, should be played with a deep and warm tone color, while the higher voices, played in octaves, should sound brighter as the octaves move higher up the instrument. The pianist should voice to the highest pitch within these bell-like octaves. The right hand should play very close to the keyboard. The middle

layer has the *habañera* rhythms, which should sound the most present in these measures, but the dynamic level still needs to be controlled within the *ppp* area (see figure 21).

Figure 21. Debussy, *Estampes*, “La Soirée dans Grenade,” mm. 1-4.



There are many instances of *rubato* during the whole piece, which can be challenging to control. When playing these passages, the pianist needs to make sure that the *habañera* rhythm is still present and precise, because it is easy to lose the sense of *habañera* rhythm among everything else (see figure 22).

Figure 22. Debussy, *Estampes*, “La Soirée dans Grenade,” mm. 23-26.



There are many sections of chordal planing, often including chromaticism. When playing these chords, it is easy to play wrong notes. Keeping a fixed hand shape while moving up and down makes these passages easier to play. The pianist should also practice these sections using just open octaves and various combinations of intervals (see figure 23).

Figure 23. Debussy, *Estampes*, “La Soirée dans Grenade,” mm. 29-30.



It is important to bring out the main voice while playing the thicker textures. For example, mm. 41-44 contains multiple layers, but the most important voice is the top voice, which is doubled in octaves. Although the *habañera* rhythms should be present, they are subordinate to the melody. As the texture gets thinner throughout this section, the pianist should make sure to highlight the notes with *tenutos* in order to shape and bring out the main melodic line.

There are many examples of melodic octaves combined with inner voices. One example can be seen in mm. 67-73 (see figure 24). The pianist should practice the octave melody notes, and then practice the inner voice separately to aid in memorization.

Figure 24. Debussy, *Estampes*, “La Soirée dans Grenade,” mm. 67-73.



Debussy imitates different instruments in this piece. The beginning of the piece begins with the *ppp* dotted *habañera* rhythm, which is reminiscent of a triangle or small bells. Motive x contains thick chords, which imitate a strumming guitar. Measures 109-112 and 115-118 depict percussive castanets.

Measures 96-106 can be challenging when performed up to tempo. The left hand contains a melody within a chordal texture in the middle register of the piano, interrupted with bass notes played sometimes up to two octaves lower, which can be challenging to play in time. Also, the dynamic is *pianissimo*, which is hard to control while playing big leaps in a fast tempo. The accompaniment in the right hand should be played clearly with articulation and shaping while the left hand should be emphasized, all within a *pianissimo* dynamic level.

The coda sections in mm. 109-112 and mm. 115-118 also present pianistic challenges. The rhythmic subdivision of the beat on the first beat of every measure is different from the other beats in the measure. Also, the part is hard to play due to the increased tempo and rapid alternation of chords between hands. The pianist should keep a fixed hand shape and use wrist rotation instead of using only the fingers for greater consistency of sound. Relying only on the fingers may cause the section to fall apart rhythmically.

“Jardins sous la pluie”

The third and final piece in *Estampes* is closer to home for Debussy, since he incorporates two French folk tunes: “Do, do, l’enfant do” and “Nous n’irons plus au bois.” This piece is very characteristic of Debussy’s Impressionist writing, evoking a vivid sense of the scene suggested by the title in brilliant colors. It contains patterned broken chords, perhaps representing the scenes of mist and rainstorms, followed by sunshine and a bright sky. One can almost feel the raindrops as if one was racing toward shelter.

Form

This piece consists of four main sections, creating an ABCD form.¹⁶ The first section lasts from mm. 1-72. Measures 1-56 state the first theme, based on the French folk song

¹⁶Anatone, “discussion on Debussy’s *Estampes*.”

“Dodo, l’enfant do.” Measures 56-74 function as a transition to the next section.¹⁷ The B section lasts from mm. 75-100. It introduces the second theme (“Nous n’irons plus au bois”), interspersed with the first one. Section C lasts from mm. 100-125 and includes some new arpeggiated material as well as the first theme. Section D begins in m. 126. Here, Debussy plays with both themes heard throughout the piece.

Texture

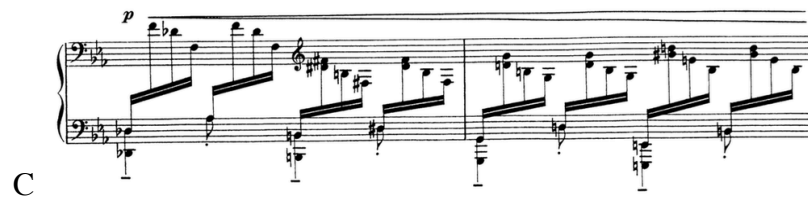
The texture of this piece varies throughout. At the beginning, it consists of broken chords with running sixteenth-note patterns alternating between the two hands: the left hand plays the melody note on each downbeat (see figure 25-A). As the music progresses, Debussy preserves the same rhythmic pattern but gives the left hand several different layers (see figure 25-B). Sometimes the left hand changes from single notes to intervals or chords, and sometimes the second note of each beat changes from single notes to intervals as well (see figure 25-C).

Figure 25, Debussy, *Estampes*, “Jardins sous la pluie,” A: mm. 1-3, B: mm. 37-39, C: mm. 52-53.



¹⁷ Schmitz, “The Piano Works,” 90.

Figure 25 (continued).



In the beginning of the second section, a new melody based on “Nous n’irons plus au bois” is presented in the right hand at m. 75 within a multi-layered texture. The melody is then taken over by a statement in the left hand of “Dodo, l’enfant dort” at m. 83 with a shimmering ostinato and various chordal accompaniments (see figure 26). The texture changes at m. 100. Here, the right hand plays running quintuplets and sextuplets, while the left hand plays pedal octave Gs. Debussy eventually adds a middle voice as the melody at m. 112 (see figure 27).

Figure 26, Debussy, *Estampes*, “Jardins sous la pluie,” mm. 81-83.



Figure 27, “Jardins sous la pluie,” mm. 100-113



Tempo

This piece is written in the style of a toccata. The beginning tempo is marked “*Net et vif*” (clean and crisp), which requires a fast tempo and clean touch on the keyboard. It contains some fluctuations in tempo. Debussy indicates “*animez et augmentez peu à peu*” (animate and increase gradually) at m. 56, which needs to be played more and more quickly, then “*en se calmant*” (calming down) at m. 72. He returns to the original tempo at m. 75. He also indicates “*Retenu*” followed by a return to the tempo several times, which is common in Debussy’s music. Measure 126 is marked “*en animant jusqu'à la fin*” (driving to the end), with a variety of dynamic changes, which brings the piece to the climax at the end.

Dynamics

There are frequent dynamic changes during this piece. It begins *pianissimo*, and as the layers become thicker, Debussy gradually increases the dynamic level to *forte* at m. 24. Debussy returns to *pianissimo* after a one-measure diminuendo at the F# major section at m. 27: the sudden drastic change of dynamics along with the equally drastic change in harmonies from A major to F# major differentiates the two sections successfully.


There are other instances in which Debussy accompanies drastic harmonic changes with stark dynamic changes. For example in mm. 42-43, when the dynamic changes from *piano* to *forte*, the harmonic structure changes as well from C diminished to C minor.

Rhythm


This piece uses toccata rhythms that perhaps portray raindrops, as indicated by the title. There are three different rhythmic patterns, which suggest different stages of rain: continuous sixteenth notes, continuous triplets, and sextuplets and quintuplets (see figure 28).

Figure 28. Debussy, *Estampes*, “Jardin sous la pluie,” A: mm. 4-5, B: mm.79-80, C: mm. 88-89.

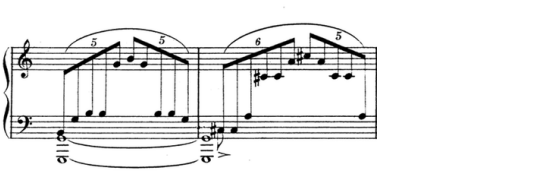
A



B



C



Harmony

Debussy uses many different keys in this piece. He begins the piece in E minor, perhaps to portray the gloom and sprinkle before a rainstorm, and moves to C# major in the B section, in a fairly straightforward manner. The third section contains many altered diatonic and chromatic harmonies, perhaps describing the influence of the storm. Debussy brings back the first theme at m. 148, but instead of being in E minor, he provides the theme in a brighter B major tonality, perhaps suggesting the sunshine after the rainfall.

Practice and Performing Suggestions

This piece can pose many technical challenges for the pianist. Like the other pieces in this set, the majority of this piece uses very quiet dynamic levels, mainly *piano* and *pianissimo*. This is difficult to control, especially due to the fast tempo. The pianist should play with less arm weight to achieve a lighter sound.

Careful pedaling is required. The beginning contains different articulations in the left hand: mm. 1-3 have staccatos on the first notes of each beat, which require no sustain pedaling; mm. 4-9 require holding the bass note for one or two measures, which indicates the use of sustain pedaling; then there are no staccato signs and tenuto signs in mm. 1-13, which suggests the use of sparse sustain pedaling for each beat. Flutter pedaling is also needed in order to reduce dynamic levels rapidly: m. 13 should be reduced from *forte* to *piano*; in measures 126 and 130 the dynamic level changes from *rinforzando* to *piano*.

The tempo of this piece is very fast. When playing the toccata passages, arms and wrists should be totally relaxed; fingers should move actively and should be very close to the keyboard. When playing the sixteenth-note patterns alternating between the two hands, both hands should cooperate very well, to make sure that every note has the same duration, same volume and the same articulation so that it sounds like it is being played by one hand.

There are many color changes throughout the piece. For example, the repeated A major chords at mm. 25-26 slide into a drastically different key, F# major, at m. 27. This requires a brighter tone color. A brighter tone can be achieved by a faster attack to the keyboard, and more active fingers than the preceding section.

Debussy uses various broken chord patterns. For example, in mm. 56-57, the right hand plays repeated arpeggiated augmented chords built on different notes. In order to play these sections quickly, the pianist should first analyze and block the chords, then keep a fixed hand shape while moving the hand and arm horizontally.

Rapid wide leaps in the last section must be performed very quickly. For example, it may be challenging to play the right hand on time in mm. 127-128 and mm. 131- 132 because of the wide leaps within limited time. The problem occurs again in the left hand of mm. 133 and 140: the big leaps between every note of the first beat of both measures is a challenge.

As in the other movements, Debussy requires different simultaneous articulations and tone colors between the two hands. In mm. 148-155, the right hand requires a bright tone color with a bell-tone articulation in the top voice while the left hand requires a deeper tone color, played legato. The arm's weight should be consistent through this entire section.

Another difficult section occurs in mm. 64-70, where Debussy presents chromatic chords with intervals that expand and contract. When learning these measures, it is important to do a thorough analysis and plan careful fingering.

Conclusion

Debussy's *Estampes* includes three short pieces, which he composed after he was influenced by the Paris International Exhibition in 1889. The exposure to this exhibition greatly influenced his compositional style by introducing him to many different sounds and musical styles from all over the world. As a result, he developed a new approach to composing for the keyboard, creating different tone colors by imitating different instruments and musical styles from various cultures. All three pieces in *Estampes* consist of unique compositional and pianistic techniques. They combine both eastern Oriental and western traditional techniques, both harmonically and thematically. By studying this collection, a pianist is able to learn how to express soft dynamics with different tone colors and different articulations, explore different usages of the pedals, define the harmony within complex textures with multiple voices, and experience music from different cultures. It is appropriate for advanced-level pianists. By performing *Estampes*, pianists are able to experience all aspects of Debussy's musical style.

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